

Turning Around Downtown:

The Steps to Revitalization and Redevelopment

Downtown revitalization requires a high degree of cooperation and is best achieved when the unique private public process is used.

Since the rise of cities 8000 years ago, humans have only wanted to walk about 1500 feet until they begin looking for an alternative means of transport: a horse, a trolley, a bicycle, or a car.

Successful downtown turnarounds have shown that for every one dollar of public investment there will be \$10-\$15 of private money.

Step 1: Capture the Vision

The best intentions...

Beginning any journey, especially one as arduous as revitalizing and redeveloping a depressed downtown, requires intention. Without the intention of actually revitalizing the downtown, there is little reason to begin the process in the first place. There are many skeptics that will never see the point of bringing back an obsolete, forsaken downtown and give it little if no chance of succeeding.

Rallying the troops, setting the vision.

Once the motivation is clearly there, the downtown revitalizing process generally begins by lining up the political and business starts.

A good starting point is to engage in envisioning process. While denigrated by some for being soft and fuzzy, a visioning process not only determines if there is community support but it also uncovers the emotional, economic, and fiscal reasons for turning around the downtown.

Every downtown has unique assets that must be understood and built upon to achieve the turnaround. It is a red downtown that cannot succeed, if there is the intention.

Step 2: Develop a Strategic Plan.

Character. Housing. Retail. Culture. Public infrastructure. Employment. Community involvement. Involvement on nonprofit organizations. Marketing. Social values.

Step 3: Forge a Healthy Private/Public Partnership.

Successful downtown revitalization and redevelopment are generally private/ public partnerships not the other way around. The public sector may convene the strategy process but it must quickly be led by the private entities whose time and money will ultimately determine the efforts success. A healthy, sustained partnership is crucial to getting the revitalization redevelopment process off the ground and building the critical mass needed to spare a cycle of sustainable development. The key the key to the public sectors success for involvement in downtown redevelopment is to avoid making it overly political. Once it has been launched, it is essential for future politicians to *keep their hands off* to the maximum extent possible.

Township leaders must be absolutely committed to the process both in word and in deed, and be willing and able to do what it takes to help create the right environment for private sector development and investment.

Step 4: Make the Right Thing Easy.

A form-based code should be put in place that reinforces the development of walk able urbanism. Unlike traditional zoning codes, which focus on allowed uses, form-based codes focus on form, namely, how building envelopes and ultimately whole blocks address the street. They do not mandate parking ratios, making the assumption the investors and bankers in a project are better able to decide what makes markets sense. Most importantly, the form-based code is simple and allows for greater flexibility and certainty in obtaining building permits.

Step 5: Establish Business Improvement Districts.

The business improvement district main leadership role is managing the implementation of the strategy, which must be constantly updated. The business improvement district may be responsible, for example, for ensuring the various task forces is charged with implementing parts of the strategy unmotivated to complete their efforts. The business improvement district might also create a new signage program for downtown, work for the development and approval of the form-based code, and market the downtown to new developers.

The business improvement districts operational role is usually one increasing the perceived and actual safety of downtown; to making the place cleaner; three creating festival and events to encourage people to come downtown, and; four improving the downtowns image.

Step 6: Create an Entertainment District.

Movie theaters. The new generation of movie theaters megaplexes with digital sound and stadium seating also benefit from a downtown location. They also spark significant restaurant demand.

Restaurants. A crucial part of any entertainment strategy, restaurants provides lunch for office workers and dinner for nighttime crowds broadening their appeal and financial success.

Specialty Retail. Unique clothing, shoes, cosmetics, gift, and other specialty stores as well as service providers such as day spas and design studios can be attracted downtown this will be mostly small, locally owned retailers but will also include national chains.

Festivals. Street festivals can be introduced relatively quickly to a reviving downtown since there is little or no capital outlay.

Arts. The vast array of arts organizations particularly music performers and visual artists have a natural affinity for downtowns.

Conclusion. Revitalization and redevelopment is one of the most complex, challenging and undertakings anyone can embark on. There are many skeptics and even those who support the process may have unrealistic expectations and frustrations. Yet, seeing her dead downtown come to life is a great reward for any community and worth investing time, energy, and emotion.

Ultimately reaching critical mass means that the redevelopment process is unstoppable and cannot be reversed.

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